

**Nancy M. White**  
Chair, Macomb County Board of Commissioners  
2006 State of the County Address  
March 30, 2006

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Good afternoon. Thank you for joining me for the annual address on the State of Macomb County.

This is a time of exciting growth and great potential. We have taken our first strides into the 21st century and the future of Macomb County is bright indeed.

It is an honor to deliver this address at the University Center. This fantastic facility offers a great opportunity for those in Macomb County to conveniently pursue advanced degrees from a host of partnering higher education institutions. Thank you President Al Lorenzo of Macomb Community College and to the Macomb County Alliance of Chambers and Huntington National Banks for presenting this event.

Before we reflect on where we've been this past year and look ahead to where we are going, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues on the Board of Commissioners. Together we have worked to meet the challenges of managing government at the county level. During good times and bad we have met those challenges.

To be sure, we will be faced with some tough situations in the year ahead. I am confident that we will work together to make the right choices for the future of Macomb County.

This month the Board of Commissioners welcomed Jim McCarthy as the new District 8 commissioner for southwest Sterling Heights. Jim took Diana Kolakowski's seat when she left the board for a new position as Economic Development Director for the City of Warren. I look forward to Jim's participation and counsel as a member of our team.

Part of what makes our community strong is the determination and tireless effort put forth by our countywide elected officials, our department heads, and our employees and union leadership. These are the people who provide the needed programs and services that make Macomb County a great place to live, work and play. They have all contributed positively towards moving our county forward.

I'd also like to take a moment to recognize our state leaders and those representing them. Thank you for working with us and for us.

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One of the very obvious ways the state has worked for us recently is located at Gratiot and Metropolitan Parkway ... the newly created Secretary of State SuperCenter. Also, a new PLUS branch office has been established in St. Clair Shores.

During my talk today, it would be wonderful to provide you with a complete description of all the accomplishments that our departments have made during the past year. However, like some of our committee meetings, that would take most of the day.

So instead, I will highlight some of our accomplishments from 2005 and refer you to our upcoming printed annual report for more details – it will be available at the end of May and mailed to every household in the county.

During last year's address, I outlined several initiatives that we intended to put into action. These initiatives were designed to maintain and attract new business, serve our citizens and position our county as a desirable location. I'd like to update you on a few of those efforts.

More than a year ago, a Community Action Committee was formed to put forth Board– funded efforts aimed at keeping both Selfridge and TACOM off the Base Realignment and Closure Commission list.

Thanks to the hard work of Peggy Mazzara, past Director of the Macomb Chamber, and the retired military people, community leaders, elected officials and others on the committee who worked so hard, the BRAC Commission recognized the importance of Selfridge and TACOM. Selfridge and TACOM were kept off the closure list! Thank you all for your extraordinary work.

Macomb County is proud to be home to these two major military installations and for very good reason. Selfridge is one of the busiest, most diverse military installations in the United States. It serves as an excellent example of cooperation among branches of the armed forces and the community.

The planned realignment at Selfridge will mean new planes and new military personnel at the base. Although there will be some challenging transitional changes to deal with over the next few years, we know that Team Selfridge will handle the changes with their usual efficiency.

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The Detroit Arsenal is poised to become the military's – indeed the world's – premier engineering and technical center for military vehicle research and development. TACOM manages the use of nearly all the Army's equipment, including that which is even now being carried by soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Twelve to 14 billion dollars of the U.S. Defense budget is allocated to TACOM.

Our local economy relies heavily on Selfridge and TACOM for military/defense contracts. It is estimated that the overall command generates eight billion dollars per year in business for the region.

Brigadier General Peplinski, of Selfridge, please stand. Eric Emerton, Director of TACOM's Public Affairs who is here representing Major General Lenaers, please also stand and be acknowledged. We appreciate your leadership and applaud your service to our country.

Let us pause for a moment to honor those who bravely continue to fight for freedom and security, both at home and abroad. We do not take this patriotic service for granted. And let us never forget those who have given their lives in service to our country.

Just as Selfridge and the Detroit Arsenal are successfully adapting to meet future conditions, the rest of Macomb County will follow their pattern.

Last year I proposed the formation of a group whose purpose would be to provide economic expertise, insight and vision to position Macomb County as a successful competitor in the global economy.

Thanks to the hard work of our Planning Department and Commissioner Kathy Vosburg, Chair of the Planning and Economic Development Committee, I'm pleased to report the "Focus Macomb: A Partnership for Economic Development," group has been formed. This advisory committee is made up of a cross-section of over a hundred key members from the business world, education, government and healthcare industries.

This group has met and will be guided by the leadership of Roy Rose and Don Torline. Don and Roy, please stand. Initiatives are underway to help shape the economic future of Macomb County. Focus Macomb will advise and assist the Board of Commissioners with issues and action that will enhance our image, encourage new investment, maintain a high quality of life and create desirable job opportunities.

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Those of us here in this room know all the reasons that make this county a great place to locate new business and industry. However, we need to make sure that people across the state, the country and the globe know it, too.

The Board of Commissioners last year allocated funds to carry out important economic strategies to help send this message. We are moving forward.

A Web site has been developed that helps to promote our county to potential businesses. We have hired a company, Intellitrends, to help us identify the industries of the future and determine which have the right characteristics to be a good fit for Macomb County. Funds have been earmarked to develop marketing materials specifically tailored to targeted business and industry sectors. And that is just the beginning.

Macomb County will soon be home to a new development near Hall Road and Romeo Plank called Partridge Creek Fashion Park. The Clinton Township development will cover 117 acres and will include a nearly 600,000 square-foot open-air shopping center. Parisian, Nordstrom, and MJR Theatre will anchor the complex. Five restaurants, an outdoor recreational area and more than 90 specialty retailers will be included in the center. Single-family homes as well as a senior citizen assisted living center and condominiums are also planned.

A \$400 million development that will bring in jobs, revenue and new homes is in the works for the 312 acres of land along Mound Road between 12 and 13 Mile Roads in Warren. Grand Sakwa, the developers, have started construction on Heritage Village – it includes a variety of residential and commercial sites that will revitalize the area.

Gains have been made in the number of service sector jobs in the county, particularly in the healthcare industry. And we expect to gain more. Beaumont Hospital has new facilities under construction in Macomb Township, St. Clair Shores and Warren. I learned on a recent visit to Troy Beaumont Hospital that over 4,000 Macomb County residents currently work within the Beaumont system. Businesses engaged in providing services account for about a third of the county's jobs.

Detroit is known as the Motor Capital of the World. A good deal of that reputation came from right here in Macomb County. Manufacturing has always been important to our economy. We know the key to keeping automotive jobs in Macomb County is to stay ahead with our focus on the next generation of vehicles and technology.

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Yet we also know that we cannot stand idly by while our regional neighbors lure new types of business inside their own county lines. We have the environment for businesses to succeed right here. We want high-tech, bio-research, energy technology and other industries to make Macomb County their home.

Yes, we face budgetary challenges in our county and we expect to be under pressure for some time to come. I'm sure our sponsor, Huntington National Banks, would agree that now more than ever we must be sure to make sound spending decisions and we are doing just that.

In fact, our economic fitness has been reaffirmed by Wall Street for the fourth consecutive year.

Macomb County has earned and maintained the highest possible ratings from two of Wall Street's most prestigious credit rating agencies. AAA distinction from both Moody's Investors Services and Standard & Poor's puts us head and shoulders above most. Only 38 counties out of more than 3,000 nationwide can make this claim.

The seed for successful economic development has been planted and we must continue to work hard to have those efforts grow and prosper.

Of course, new growth in business sectors and residential areas brings concerns for improvements in basic services and communications.

Almost two years ago, the Board of Commissioners approved contracts with Motorola and the State of Michigan for development of a countywide communications system for police, fire and EMS. The goal was to replace an outdated radio system and make it possible for all jurisdictions to be able to talk to one another.

Last fall, tower construction was completed. Just this month, radio base equipment was installed at all nine sites. The radio project is currently eight months ahead of schedule and over a half million dollars under budget.

This project could not have been done without the help of the cities and townships that agreed to place radio communication towers on their land. This type of cooperative spirit is one of the advantages that enable Macomb County to react quickly and effectively.

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When Hurricane Katrina caused devastation last year, Macomb County did not hesitate to help. I'm proud to report that cooperation and action was immediate. All of our department heads stepped up to the plate and so did cities, townships and members of the community. Our Emergency Management Department became the point of contact for evacuees who came to Macomb County for relief.

Within a matter of hours after finding out that evacuees would be heading to Macomb County, hotels, realtors and others were contacted to line up accommodations for displaced Katrina victims. Health and medical supplies, prescriptions, educational needs, clothing, food, employment and transportation needs were anticipated and provided for the evacuees when they arrived.

*Macomb Together* for Hurricane Relief was formed as a coordinated endeavor to raise financial donations from residents, schools and businesses all over the county. More than a quarter million dollars was raised and given to aid agencies helping victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The county has serviced approximately 160 evacuees and continues to do so for the people that have remained and are eligible for services. County departments and many individual businesses, churches and community groups provided these services.

Some representatives of the groups that were instrumental in the coordinated effort to respond to the disaster are here this afternoon. Please stand as I call your names: Ruthie Stevenson, president of the Macomb County NAACP; Steve Stolaruk from the Best Western ConCorde Inn; Jamie Copeland from the Comfort Inn in Mount Clemens; and Vic Martin from the Best Western Sterling Inn. Thank you all for everything you have done and continue to do.

As in most cases, this disaster brought to light our strengths and successes as well as our weaknesses – not only as a single community, but also as a nation as a whole. We will review and revise our response plans as necessary.

Our departments are working hard to respond to the needs of our residents with a host of important services. Just a few achievements over the past year include:

- Over 23,000 county residents received flu shots at outreach clinics.
- Nearly 10,000 seniors have been assisted with meals, chores and home maintenance.

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- Over 9,600 low-income residents received emergency assistance, education and training, transportation as well as information and referrals.
- Dozens of community presentations have been made to assist seniors trying to navigate the complex choices in the new Medicare D prescription program.
- The Veterans Relief Fund was established last June to assist veterans who do not qualify for the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund

But there's more work to be done.

We have more than 1,100 homeless people right here in our own backyard. The *Macomb Together* – Helping at Home initiative launched in December to raise funds to help satisfy basic needs like food and shelter for the homeless – basics that many of us take for granted.

So far, nearly \$17,000 has been raised for the *Macomb Together* – Helping at Home fund. That dollar amount must grow. We will continue efforts to help those in need right here at home.

Going forward we must look to maintain a high-quality and cost-effective network of comprehensive educational, economic and social services to Macomb County residents in need. We must make efforts to diminish the causes and effects of poverty.

The Board of Commissioners is working toward accomplishing that goal.

We approved a comprehensive “Living Wage” policy designed to ensure that companies doing business with the county pay their full– time employees wages that are sufficient to meet basic needs.

This may be a controversial subject, but it is important. We all need to look toward the future and at the big picture. We must make this work. Living wage ordinances in other cities and counties have not led to higher contract costs and have instead leveled the playing field in the bidding process.

Wayne, Washtenaw and Ingham counties and 16 cities in Michigan, including Eastpointe and Warren, have similar living wage policies in effect. And, more than a hundred major cities across the United States also require living wage standards.

Putting our Living Wage policy into effect is a prime opportunity for us to improve the standard of living for workers in Macomb County.

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Last year the Macomb/St. Clair Workforce Development Board, through its Michigan Works! Service Centers in Macomb County, assisted thousands of job seekers post resumes on Michigan Talent Bank. They placed over 2,000 public assistance recipients into full-time jobs. And 41 county residents who lost their jobs due to foreign competition were retrained through the Board of Commissioners' TRADE program.

We are willing to be the positive example for other communities.

And speaking of setting examples, I am pleased to report that in January the Board overwhelmingly passed a new Code of Ethics. This policy sets forth a clear standard of professional behavior for the County's elected officials and employees.

In this age of political cynicism and mistrust of government, those of us who have been elected, appointed, or hired into public service must show our commitment to fulfill not only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law.

We are also committed to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for our families. Avian flu is a current health concern both here and around the world.

The Macomb County Health Department and the Michigan Department of Community Health have drafted plans to respond to an influenza pandemic if the situation should arise.

Plans are being developed on a regional basis with area hospitals that would establish temporary facilities in case there is an extraordinary number of sick people due to an influenza pandemic. The Health Department is working on a process for dispensing antiviral medications and administering vaccines to high-risk persons in the county with available supplies. The Macomb County Medical Examiner's Office will develop contingency plans. Educational materials for seasonal influenza and pandemic influenza are available from the Health Department.

The Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Program worked with local schools to bring healthy eating information and exercise programs to Macomb County children.

We are working to preserve our green spaces so that kids and adults alike have access to our wealth of recreational opportunities.



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The Countywide Master Plan for Trails envisions a network of linked trails – paths in every community across the 482 square miles that make up this county. These trails would make it possible for people to be outdoors – to be physically active – and to get places without getting into a car. This would make for a much healthier community – more people would find it safe and easy to be physically active, fewer cars would be the roads and we would have good reasons to maintain open space. In fact, a trail system could be healthy for our economy – people like to visit places where they can walk and bike, especially if there are interesting destinations along the way.

It is vital that we continue to focus on working hard, working smart and working to serve Macomb County's health and best interests.

Macomb County's population stands at more than 836,000 today and we are looking forward to a million residents in 2020. An average of 19 newcomers make Macomb County their home each day. A very notable couple – Horus and Hathor, a pair of endangered Peregrine falcons – made their nest on the County Building last year and have decided to stay. Of course, who can blame them for wanting to be in downtown Mount Clemens these days?

Mount Clemens is booming! Older buildings are being re-developed, there are new restaurants, a riverfront park has been proposed, and more. I hope you had the chance to experience some of the DDA's great activities that got this area "into the game" when the Super Bowl was in town. They did a great job, and many thanks go to Arthur Mullen, Director of the Mount Clemens Downtown Development Authority, and his team.

Macomb County is very proud of the cooperative relationship that we have with our county seat. Last year, when Mount Clemens faced a budget deficit and the prospect of an income tax, Sheriff Mark Hackel offered to take over police services at a huge savings for city residents. There was a very smooth transition to the new arrangement. We look forward to more mutually beneficial projects and collaboration.

Within the county, we are moving forward with training and programs aimed at being more responsive to workplace issues. The recently implemented Employee Feedback Program will serve as a tool to enable better flow of communication between all levels. We will take every step possible to provide a positive, cooperative work environment.

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We also realize the importance of working in cooperation with our region. Our county is intertwined culturally, socially and economically with Oakland and Wayne counties. I have had several meetings with my Big Four colleagues, Oakland County Executive Brooks Patterson, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and Wayne County Executive Bob Ficano. We realize that our individual achievements are greater when they benefit the entire region.

We are committed to the success of Southeastern Michigan as a whole.

We have teamed up to provide regional information to visitors at video kiosks located in Metro Airport. We took advantage of this year's Super Bowl to showcase our county, as well as the region, with special activities along with increased publication and promotional efforts. Samples are available here for you today.

Macomb County is an active member of the Detroit Regional Chamber, the Detroit Regional Economic Partnership and Automation Alley. We are also supportive of the efforts of the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau and Detroit Renaissance. Our Planning Department had discussions with the Visitor's Bureau earlier this month and talked about the rich tourism opportunities that exist in southeast Michigan. Specifically, we plan to develop strategies to promote Macomb County as a Tourism Destination District and to develop travel packages to offer to visitors.

Our state and region will benefit from the 21st Century Jobs Fund, announced late last year. The fund will spark new investment and create high-tech companies and jobs which will diversify our economy.

The Job Creation Loan Program – part of Governor Granholm's Jobs Today/Jobs Tomorrow economic plan – promises to help business grow. It will help Michigan businesses create at least 5,000 jobs. We're confident that a large number of those jobs will be right here in Macomb County.

These are very determined efforts that are being made to help raise Macomb County's profile and advance our economic position. We must work to maintain the momentum of the initiatives we have started and find the dollars to continue these efforts in the future.

Is it easier to reminisce about the way things used to be? Certainly.

Is change uncomfortable? Absolutely.

Will we have differences of opinion about future plans? Of course.

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But in Macomb County we choose to embrace the future. We are not afraid to challenge ourselves and to take the steps necessary to successfully guide our county into the days to come.

One of the key factors in successfully preparing for the future is to have a vision and the strategic plans to get there.

We will invite more businesses to make their homes here and maintain an environment in which they will stay. Our Focus Macomb group is poised to help us do just that.

We will continue to provide citizens with the excellent services offered by our departments. Last year – for the 24th consecutive year – Macomb County earned more National Association of Counties Achievement Awards than any other county in the state of Michigan. Macomb County ranked seventh in the nation last year for the number of awards received. The details of the programs recognized have been entered into a national database so that other counties can emulate them.

Our efforts are being recognized, we are leading by example and we will continue to do so.

We will see to it that the Macomb Health Plan moves forward to offer health care benefits to the uninsured on a shared-cost basis.

This summer, low wage employees – the working poor who average under \$13 an hour – will be able to access a “One Third Share Program.” For a comprehensive health plan an employer will pay one third of the monthly premium, the employee will pay one third and the Macomb Health Plan will contribute the remaining third. Approximately 5,000 workers will be able to access this innovative program.

We have already embraced advancements and innovations in information technology and will continue to move forward under the leadership and guidance of our IT Department.

This past year, our Information Technology department was honored with a Michigan Excellence in Technology first place award for the “Best Application serving a Public Organization’s Business Needs” for the online Vital Records system in the County Clerk’s office.

Every department in the county is working from new technology based systems. But the best is yet to come.

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With a solid infrastructure in place today, the services of tomorrow will be increasingly accessible online and in a paperless fashion.

Macomb County partnered with Mount Clemens on an ambitious initiative that will make free high-speed wireless Internet access available to all Macomb County residents and businesses by next year. The first phase is to make the service available in downtown Mount Clemens by the first of June. Phase two extends service to the rest of the city. Phase three brings wireless to the rest of Macomb County. Free wireless broadband is another tool in our economic development toolbox.

We must look to streamline and simplify in other areas. It's no secret that I support the formation of the county executive model of leadership for Macomb County. I have talked about it during my last two State of the County addresses and elsewhere. It's a very big, very important issue and worth repeating.

If we are going to be on equal footing with neighboring communities and most efficiently serve a population of nearly one million people, Macomb County will require an elected CEO who is accountable to the voters. I believe the people have the right to directly elect this leader.

Currently the Board of Commissioners holds both legislative and executive powers. Changing to an elected county executive and maintaining a streamlined board of commissioners will separate those powers and allow checks and balances. A county executive should run the day-to-day operations, and the board should take care of the policy-making and legislative duties.

I reported last year that a number of constituencies were surveyed as part of an economic development initiative. Those groups made it known that not having a county executive is seen as a negative – a detriment to doing business in Macomb County.

We are working in a global economy, and it is expected – demanded even – that there be a single point of contact in top-level discussions. Attracting business to our county is the number one key to a successful future. We must do what we know is necessary, and right, to ensure that Macomb County is positioned where it should be for the future.

I don't advocate the change to county executive leadership because it's a partisan cause or part of a personal agenda. It goes well beyond partisan politics – I believe it's a fundamental issue and absolutely necessary to bring before the electorate for discussion.

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I spoke earlier about working together to make the right choices for Macomb County – no matter how challenging the task. It's time to meet the challenges and head for a change in how we do things here.

In his book, "The World is Flat," Thomas L. Friedman describes the chain of social and technological shifts that took place around the year 2000 and led to the leveling of the global economic playing field. Developments in technology and communication make it easy for me to keep a very close eye on my grandkids – including the two newest ones – despite the fact that they live in other parts of the country. These developments also make it easy for anyone to openly communicate and do business all over the world.

According to Friedman, this brings another 3 billion people into the world's competitive economic game. Macomb County must learn and adapt to the realities of competing in a global economy.

We've all chosen Macomb County. This is where we want to live, work and raise our families. We all want a safe, clean, caring community with economic and cultural opportunities.

Macomb County is all of those things and more. Let's continue to do our best to make Macomb County its best.

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